



# UGANDA

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## LESSONS FROM NORTHERN UGANDA IN ADDRESSING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE



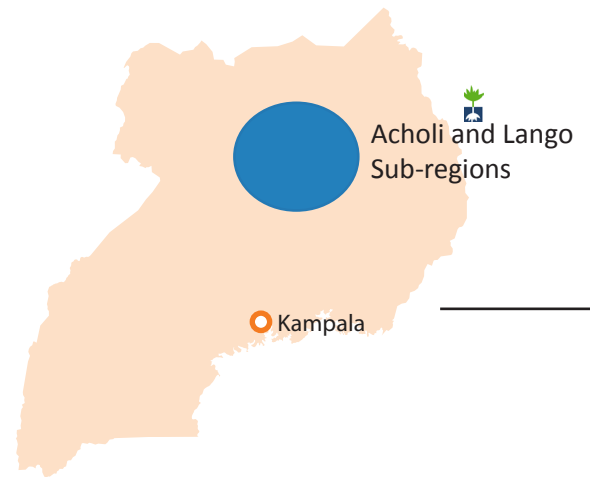


**Action Against Hunger aims to empower women in Northern Uganda using a two pronged strategy; a) cash transfers, skills training and VSLAs for income generating activities, and b) interventions to prevent violence against women at the household and community level. These interventions combine to become a transformative learning experience for participating individuals and communities.**

**Participants attain positive and sustainable outcomes on livelihoods through the knowledge on protecting economic assets and strategic diversification of productive activities, which can be empowering for women in securing their economic independence and stability.**







## Vulnerability Context

### Background

Northern Uganda is characterized by widespread chronic poverty. For two decades, the region was severely affected by a brutal rebellion, led by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) against the present Government of Uganda (GoU). These communities first experienced extreme sexual and physical violence at the hands of the insurgents, through abduction of children as sex slaves or as child soldiers, and indiscriminate mutilation and murders.

Subsequently, nearly 1.7 million people were forced by the GoU to move into Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps. In 2007, after multiple attempts at peace negotiations that were inconclusive, the GoU and LRA signed the Agreement of Accountability and Reconciliation. The rebellion was subsequently quelled.

After the war, IDPs, refugees, LRA's former recruits and abductees returned to their villages and resettled. However, they face challenges of re-establishing their lives in a context where there was a complete breakdown of social structures and livelihoods. The land reclamation process was slow and volatile as a result of widespread chronic food insecurity, weak social cohesion and limited livelihood alternatives to subsistence agriculture.

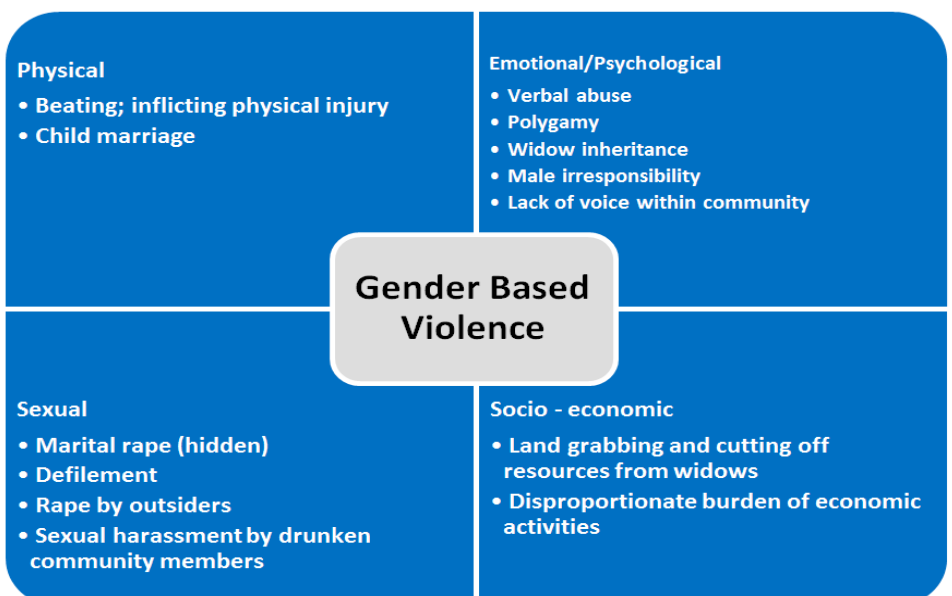
### Gender Based Violence

GoU recognizes that the resettlement process has to be based on principles of social justice. Addressing gender<sup>1</sup> inequality is central to achieving these goals. Injustice meted out on the pretext of gender hierarchies, also known as Gender Based Violence (GBV), is defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)<sup>2</sup> as "any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed differences between males and females."

This definition ascribes a broad landscape for gender-sensitive programming, as it acknowledges violence inflicted against both men and women of any age, and allows violence to be understood and addressed in a meaningful, relevant manner. GBV<sup>3</sup> is prevalent across the globe in all societies, but it is more

pervasive and hidden in traditional societies. It is often observed that certain kinds of violence against vulnerable groups, such as women and girl children, is often an acceptable form of social interaction and hence difficult to identify and address appropriately.<sup>4</sup>

GBV generally includes, although is not limited to: sex-selective abortion; differential access to food and services; sexual exploitation and abuse, including trafficking, child marriage; female genital mutilation/cutting; sexual harassment; dowry/bride price abuse; honor killing; domestic or intimate partner violence; deprivation of inheritance or property; and elder abuse. Particularly in armed conflict, widespread sexual violence was used as a weapon of war to destabilize and control communities.



## Before and After the War

In Acholi society, gender inequality manifests through dominant traditions such as polygamy, widow inheritance and payment of bride price. Prior to the war, the clans were tight knit, rich in terms of livestock and land, had well-established safety nets that ensured the well-being of women, as they were the primary caregivers of the clan's heirs. The protection of women was a major responsibility of their husbands and of the clan's patriarchs. Roles and responsibilities of men and women were clearly demarcated on the basis of where the tasks were to be carried out and labor intensity. These gender dynamics changed drastically after the war as communities faced chronic food insecurity and competed over fewer resources. The dire living conditions were further exacerbated by widespread alcoholism amongst men, and the subsequent burden on women as they increasingly took on the role of the provider.

## Programme Overview

In 2009, ACF introduced an unconditional cash transfer programme (CTP), "Livelihoods and Economic Recovery in Northern Uganda" (LEARN) implemented in two phases, and supporting 1,500 beneficiaries<sup>5</sup> in the Otuke district of the Lango sub-region.

In 2011, ACF expanded its CTP to include Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and GBV prevention activities to establish the "Combating Gender Based Violence and Enhancing Economic Empowerment of Women in Northern Uganda" programme in Amuru, Nwoya and Otuke districts in Acholi and Lango sub-regions.

ACF provided cash transfers of approximately USD170 to individuals. A total of 16,417 beneficiaries were targeted through this programme. ACF organized livelihoods and VSLA training of trainers in which 220 groups were formed with a total of 6,600 members over three years.

Gender based violence prevention activities for raising awareness were implemented with ACF's implementing partners, African Youth Initiative Network (AYINET) and Community Rural Empowerment and Support Organization (CRESO).

### Empowering Women

There are two key broad causes of GBV in Northern Uganda; unequal cultural norms, and the impact of brutal conflict and displacement. ACF's programme addressed the multiple dimensions of GBV; physical, emotional, sexual and socio-economic, to mitigate the influence of these factors.

The key challenge was to establish realistic parameters in which an external organization may operate, as GBV is a sensitive topic for traditional patriarchal societies and requires a local understanding of gender-related concepts.

ACF focused on a two pronged strategy to achieve these goals: 1) economically empowering women through cash transfers, livelihoods training and VSLAs, and 2) raising awareness on the ill effects of GBV and facilitating access to a GBV referral system.

The ultimate aim was to contribute to the creation of an economically strengthened, gender-equal and women-centric society. Cash transfers encourage and empower women to engage in productive activities, to access and control key economic resources and secure their basic needs.

## Implementation

### Beneficiary Targeting and Registration

Following a project launch where local authorities were sensitized on the basic project objectives and implementation modalities, communities were approached and introduced to the project.

Beneficiary targeting consisted of 3 steps: 1) Geographical targeting for selecting villages and parishes together with government officials; Assistant Secretaries, CDOs and village Local Councilors (LCI), 2) Beneficiary selection through community wealth ranking, and 3) Household verification using a Vulnerability versus Capability Assessment.

Once beneficiaries were selected, trained and had developed Household Action Plans, they received a onetime cash transfer of USD170. Bank accounts for all beneficiaries were opened in collaboration with Post Bank Uganda.

### GBV Prevention Activities

ACF staff were trained on GBV prevention by the American Refugee Council (ARC), who was leading the UN Joint Action Program on Gender Based Violence in Uganda.



The training equipped ACF staff with knowledge and skills to mainstream gender concepts into CTPs, and provided key skills to work with vulnerable women and girls.

ACF and its implementing partners AYINET and CRESO developed and procured IEC materials for GBV prevention awareness-raising, of which 2,000 pictorial brochures, 250 T-shirts and 1 Training Manual; and used these to sensitize nearly 2,400 community members.

The two partners created 60 GBV women groups over 3 years. They conducted 252 trainings for 12,723 women participants, on issues of GBV, gender equality, land and property rights.

4,834 men were identified and trained on GBV preventive initiatives, gender equality, land and property rights including the role of men as GBV change agents in the community. In order to support GBV survivors to seek redress, the project established referral pathways and facilitated referrals.

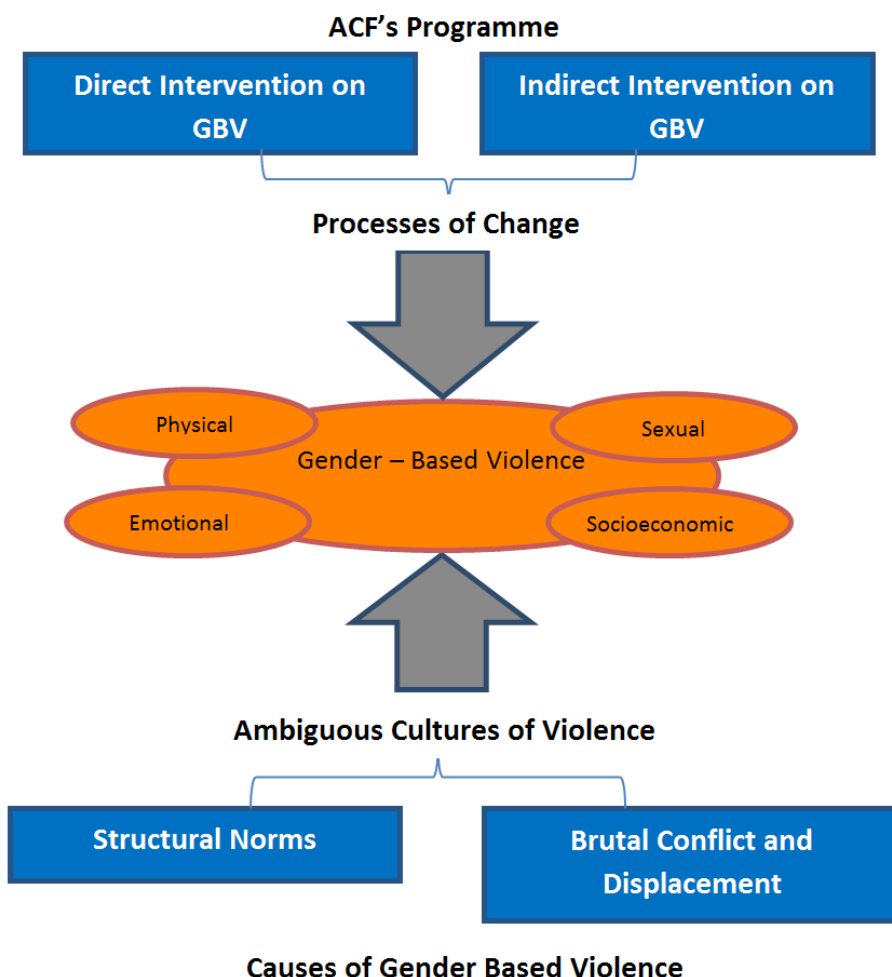
During this period, 1,570 women were referred to institutions such as the Child and Family Protection Unit of the Uganda Police, health centres, GBV women activists and local clan leaders for GBV redress.

The reduction in the number of cases among targeted beneficiaries was partly attributed to the close follow up by ACF partners and the active role played by the women activists.

The partners also trained 82 stakeholders on GBV prevention and response strategies, gender equality and equity, protection and accountability, impacts of GBV on community livelihoods and welfare including the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in GBV prevention.

The major stakeholders targeted include the district GBV focal persons, health centre II and III personnel, police representatives, LCs, clan leaders, probation officers, Sub County women development officials and women activists' leaders.

As a way of ensuring early awareness and promoting GBV prevention, 497 boys and girls from selected primary schools were identified and trained on causes of GBV, referral pathways, intimate partnership youth violence and economic development skills especially income generating activities (IGA) as future change agents on GBV in the community.



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## Programme Outcomes

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### VSLA Activities

Training of Trainers on VSLA methodologies was conducted for staff members in order to strengthen knowledge on VSLA methodologies. Participants obtained knowledge and skills in VSLA methodologies, key concepts and best practices; acquired skills for facilitating meetings; and prepared for their supervising roles of VSLAs.

A total of 220 groups were organized consisting of 6,600 members. These groups collected up to 476,203,797 UGX (approximately USD183,153). This money was collected, borrowed or loaned to members of the savings groups to address immediate household challenges such as meeting school fees, medical expenses and supporting small IGA activities. At least 9,000 loans have been issued out and 8,000 paid back with interest.

### Livelihood and Business

#### Skills Training

All staff members received a one-day refresher training on livelihood and business skills, followed by a three-day training workshop for 16,470 beneficiaries. Staff members reinforced their knowledge and facilitated the training of beneficiaries. The training focused on improving rural livelihoods, agriculture and livestock rearing.

### Children's Education

- School attendance improved as beneficiaries were able to pay the school fees on time and in advance for following terms, and cover school-related costs. These changes were limited to children attending primary school, which have lower fees and are in proximity to the villages.

### Healthcare

- The cash transfer improved households' access to healthcare with increased disposable income from small trade activities, liquid assets and access to VSLA small credit.
- Beneficiaries with chronic illnesses spent a large portion of their transfer on getting diagnosed for their long term ailments and were able to tend to their children's health. Women's health risks related to physical activity were reduced.

### Access to Economic Resources

- The cash transfer and subsequent increases in productive assets have improved women's access to land.
- The ability to hire labor reduced the physical burden of agricultural activities, and they were able to diversify their efforts towards small businesses.
- The cash transfers have a significant impact on economic well-being and self-esteem of widows; they are no longer dependent on the generosity of male relatives or community members to assist them with heavy agricultural work.

### Family Relations

- Respondents reported instances of violence when several women attempted to plan for separation from their abusive husbands, or when their demands increased as a consequence of gaining the "upper hand" in financial matters.
- In a few cases, beneficiaries reported that male partners reduced their consumption of alcohol out of fear of being abandoned and losing access to foreign aid or relief services.
- Beneficiaries with abusive partners find themselves in a complicated predicament; on one hand, they are now economically independent and thus less reliant on their partner's support, and on the other, they are culturally inclined and advised by partner organizations to remain with their partners irrespective of their presence or support.

- As a result of the cash transfer being targeted at women, and women taking the lead in economic activities, they have more control over cash inflow and outflow, and are less dependent on their male counterparts for covering cash expenses.
- There is a remarkable sense of self-esteem and an increase in aspirational horizons for children, irrespective of family relations and levels of relationship distress.





## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

**Livelihood training, with technical expertise on agricultural and livestock management, can be a transformative learning experience for beneficiaries.**

- Maximize their productivity by gaining specific knowledge on better livelihood practices.
- Attain positive and sustainable outcomes on livelihoods through knowledge on protecting economic assets and strategic diversification of productive activities.

**VSLA is a key channel for achieving women's empowerment, and creates access to social, physical and financial capital.**

- Acts as the only source of regular savings and easy borrowing, thus vital to sustaining regular incomes, continual asset building, healthcare access, referral systems and covering other unanticipated expenses.
- Provides opportunities to share experiences on agricultural and business practices, gain knowledge and raise awareness on community issues, create social networks, support.
- Weekly VSLA meetings provide an excellent platform for communicating programme messages.

**Cash transfers are another effective means for promoting women's empowerment.**

- Reduce the economic vulnerability of women and optimally diversify their productive asset base, apart from securing immediate food needs.
- Ensure a woman's economic

independence of her male counterpart, which is a significant outcome.

- Enable widows to access economic resources such as land and labor, and reduce their vulnerability to socio-economic violence by in-laws and other community members.

**GBV prevention awareness activities are most beneficial when both women and their counterparts are engaging in the process.**

- It is counterproductive to function with the assumption of masculinity as "standard and uninfluenced" by external factors. It is important to challenge men's understanding of masculinity by showing them the benefits of a violence free, stable home and by enabling them to build confidence as men and as co-providers of the household.
- All relevant stakeholders should be trained in gender concepts and introduced to GoU's Gender Policy Framework.
- Young girls should be considered as a separate target group for GBV prevention and protection training. Simultaneously, GBV prevention training for stakeholders should raise awareness on the myriad of risks that young girls are exposed to and forms of redress.
- There should be concerted efforts to ensure longevity of activist groups as they are the long term implementers of GBV prevention activities and awareness raising campaigns.

## Contact Details and Further Reading

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The full report entitled *Understanding the Interaction between Women's Economic Empowerment and Gender Based Violence: Study on ACF's Cash Transfer Programme in Northern Uganda* is available on the ACF website.

To learn more about ACF programmes in Uganda, please visit our website.

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<sup>1</sup> Gender, as defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2005), is as follows, "Gender refers to the differences between males and females that learned, and though deep – rooted in every culture, are changeable over time, and have wide variations within and between cultures. "Gender" determines the roles, responsibilities, opportunities, privileges, expectations and limitation for males and females in any culture." (FAO)

<sup>2</sup> IASC was established in June 1992 as a response to UN's Resolution to strengthen humanitarian assistance. It is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. It is a unique forum involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners.

<sup>3</sup> Perpetrators of such violence can be known or unknown to a GBV survivor; intimate partners, family members, caregivers and friends, influential community members, security forces, peace keeping forces, humanitarian aid workers, institution and the state. (ibid)

<sup>4</sup> ACF Uganda Gender Study Report 2014.

<sup>5</sup> During LEARN II, 1,877 women received training for crop production, animal traction, livestock breeding and IGA (LEARN II Final Report, 2011).



